15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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## YULENGOR

211 [212] Nomads have not acquired the art of recording their thoughts, but they make use of the well-known 'letter-stick', and those I have received have been handed over with a certain breathlessness, as if they were charmed missives. Their use is intended to lend an importance to a message, which however cannot be deciphered by the recipient. All he sees on the flat oblong chip of wood is a series of carved lines, circles, and crosses, probably partly covered by a coat of red ochre. After an appropriate examination of the stick the bearer is invariably called on to decode the message. He obligingly takes it, and pointing to one mark says that it represents the writer, that another is for his brother, that several strokes refer to a number of days or lunar months, and that a wide cut is a request for a canoe or an indication of the strength of a raiding party. Marks on letter-sticks merely remind the bearer of points in the message he is conveying. The last line on all letter-sticks sent to me invariably ended with the request: 'Please send me some tobacco.'

[648] Before leaving Darwin on the first trip to east Arnhem Land, I visited three brothers who were serving sentences for having murdered Japanese fishermen in Caledon Bay. They were glum and disinterested till I told them where I was going, and they then asked me to take a letter-stick to their father. Weeks later I delivered this message on an isolated beach near Caledon Bay, and that night the camp sang and wailed over memories revived by the letter-stick.

207 372 Probably the most popular of all delusions concerning the nomad is that he sends messages by means of smoke. I am not aware that any aboriginal has ever sent any coded signal by smoke; yet, on the other hand, they will interpret smoke-fire as indicating the presence of visitors and will light fires for an easily understood purpose, or in accordance with a pre-arranged plan. Fires that break out unexpectedly and perhaps are due to smouldering logs bursting [775]